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ABSTRACT

Practical experiences have grown dramatically in teacher education programs, apparently from a general consensus of the rightness of such experiences as well as the vigorous criticisms of teacher education programs by practicing teachers. A review of research concerning practical experience in teacher education indicates that the knowledge and skills gained from these experiences are necessary, legitimate, and of high intellectuality. (CB)

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A LOOK AT THE RATIONALE FOR PRACTICALITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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A LOOK AT THE RATIONALE FOR PRACTICALITY IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The evidence is indeed clear that the amount, variety, and intensity of "practical" (field-based, clinical, laboratory, practicum, student teaching, hands-on) experiences for pre-service teacher preparation has increased dramatically during our life-times in the profession. And, perhaps that phenomena is one sufficient rationale for practicality in teacher education. Virtually all groups, whether inside, outside, or peripheral to our profession seem to agree that more and better experiences with real children in real school settings is desireable - hence the practice must have merit.

Rationale of Consensus

Politicians, often independent of any input from teachers or teacher educators, are passing legislation requiring some rather unusual manifestations of practical orientations and directions. In Tennessee, for instance, the Comprehensive Education Reform Act of 1984 requires that "all full-time college of education faculty members, including deans of such colleges and universities shall further their professional development through direct personal involvement in public school settings of grades K-12 on a periodic basis." (CERA, Section 74) Developed by the State Board of Education, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the State Board of Regents, the University of

Tennessee Board of Trustees, and private colleges and universities with approved teacher education programs, the implementation plan for this legislation requires all education faculty (including administrators) to spend six days per year in activities such as classroom instruction, analysis, and observation; inservice training; curriculum and instruction planning; observation and evaluation of student teachers; and other direct personal involvement in public schools. (Tennessee Master Plan, 1986) The specificity of the plan and the annual reporting requirements would lead one to believe that Tennessee politicians perceive in-school experiences as the best idea since sliced bread and right up there with godliness and cleanliness. Legislative mandates of a similar nature are common in other states as well.

The growth of such practical experiences would seem to indicate a consensus of the importance of such in spite of the fact there is little evidence of the merit of such experiences. (Evertson, et.al, 1984) Nevertheless, this powerful consensus may be indicative of a strong rationale for the practical.

One might conjecture as to whether this growth in the clinical aspect of preparation reflects a diminution of time for or a lessening of commitment to those other learnings characterized as theoretical - humanistic and behavioral studies, teaching and learning theory, etc., if you will.

Apparently not. During the past decade or so, through the efforts of this organization, the American Educational Studies Association and its affiliates working through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, for example, there has been developed a very effective emphasis of the importance of such studies as well as the implementation of strategies for assuring this emphasis in the application of accreditation standards.

In 1982 a study was conducted to determine the differences of views of K-12 practitioners and teacher educators towards such issues as faculty competence for teacher education, the need and importance of theortical studies versus "practical" experiences, and appropriate amounts of time for the various kinds of practical experiences. (Christensen, 1982) A 20% stratified random sample of K-12 practitioners and teacher educators who had served at least once on an NCATE team during the academic years 1978-79, 1979-80, and 1980-81 was surveyed relative to their interpretations of various standards. Regarding foundational studies, for example, both samples indicated strong support for such but, surprisingly , K-12 practitioners viewed them as more important than did teacher educators. Both populations showed a very strong commitment to practical studies as well. Teacher educators would give more emphasis to laboratory and clinical experiences accompanying methods courses whereas K-12 practitioners emphasized the need for longer periods of student teaching.

However, the amounts recommended in each case were clearly substantial. (see Tables 1, & 2)

So, apparently, the matter is not one of either practical experiences or theoretical studies. We seem to want it all and in adequate measures.

Rationale of Discontent

Still, none of this reality evidence provides a clear rationale for the recent marked emphasis on practical experiences. Perhaps the growth of such is more directly related to the general criticism of professional preparation programs of all kinds by all kinds of professions - doctors, lawyers, engineers, ministers, as well as teachers. There seems to be a common agreement among most professions that faculty members involved in such preparation promote values that are simply not compatible with the needs or values of those preparing to go into professional service. Professional schools seem not to assist students in acquiring the skills needed for professional practice. (Argyris & Schon, 1977) Lawyers get little preparation in litigating cases or in defending clients in trials, architects get little experience in designing houses, teachers are faced with inappropriate pedagogical and curricular models, and ministers learn much about theology and the Bible but relatively little about speaking and ministering to the "flock", as it were. Schon (1983) asserts that research in professions such as law, management, and education has proved to be of little value

Table 1

Hours of Laboratory and Clinical Experiences
to be Required in a Teacher Education Program by
K-12 Practitioners and Teacher Educators

Factors	K-12 Practitioners			Teacher Educators		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Laboratory Experiences	88	32.7	40.394	83	61.7	48.965
Clinical Experiences	87	44.0	56.537	83	71.7	55.503

Table 2

Weeks of Full-time Student Teaching
to be Required in a Teacher Education Program by
K-12 Practitioners and Teacher Educators

Factor	K-12 Practitioners			Teacher Educators		
	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
Number of Weeks	92	15.94	8.129	88	13.06	4.440

to practitioners. He suggests that practitioners who reflect thoughtfully on what they are doing will get us further along the road to improvement than will discipline-based research.

The work of Dan Lortie (1966) some years ago, and replicated just recently (Kottkamp et. al. 1986) supports Schon's view. Among his findings is one showing teachers have little confidence in the effectiveness of teacher education with training experiences being very unrealistic. The major means in learning how to teach was in classroom or classroom-like experiences - actual teaching, practice teaching, parenting, recreational work, etc. Teachers deem preparation programs unrealistic forcing them to develop and refine strategies for teaching after embarking on a particular teaching assignment.

Rationale of Reason

All of which leads to the major point of this short paper - that practical experiences in teacher preparation, learning from doing, for whatever reason are now seen as respectable and desireable by the many subgroups of the teaching profession. While true that some still view such experiences as "an amalgam of effective practices and folklore wherein many rules of procedure communicated . . . .are 'unobserved' criterion measures (local cultural rules that may or may not have been the cause for the desired effect)" (McDonald, 1983) such ways of knowing are gaining attention and respect. "Ordinary knowledge" (Cousins and

Leithwood, 1986) is the kind of stuff that guides decisions and actions in most organizations. Because it is derived from actual experience, tends to be widely shared, and is fairly conmprehensive, such knowledge is more central to organizational functioning than is that which is derived from social science methods; this latter knowledge tends to be context independent, and of necessity, selective rather than comprehensive.

Philip Jackson (1986) in his The Practice of Teaching makes the point that much of knowledge essential to effective teaching "draws heavily on common sense", knowledge picked up in the course of living; knowledge for knowing how to read behavioral clues, how to interact effectively, issues of honor and integrity, etc., all very important to effective teaching.

The search for and examination of the "expert pedagogue" seems to be leading David Berliner (1986) to recognize that truly expert teachers have a different level of knowledge about classrooms and, hence, more effective strategies for dealing with their classroom functions. The strategies of such experts are quite different from those used by novices (beginner teachers) and postulants (persons from business and industry with special subject matter skills and a desire to change careers and teach in schools). It seems expert teachers amass a large knowledge base that influences everything they do in classrooms all of which results in such things as: (1) determining the intellectual

climate, (2) work orientation, (3) classroom organization, (4) sharing power with students, and many others. (Costa, 1985) "Such knowledge is complex, often tacit, derived from experience, and worthy of being called expert knowledge in most other fields." (Berliner, 1986) Such expertise takes a long time to develop; even the most obvious (discipling, getting results with both slow and rapid learners, sustaining motivation, identifying and utilizing appropriate materials) takes at least five years to master. Such domain specific knowledge is a characteristic of every kind of expert - unfortunately it has been termed low-class by many in education.

In summary, then, practical experiences have grown dramatically in teacher education programs and apparently from a general consensus of the rightness of such experiences. The vigorous criticisms of teacher education programs by practicing teachers have had a significant impact as well no doubt. And it appears that knowledge gained from these practical experiences is necessary, legitimate, and of high intellectuality. Perhaps the profession of teaching, in all of its subsets, is coming to realize the evidence of this.

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